



## **Jack Reed**

Oral History Transcription

August 1, 2001 [Side A]

Interviewed by:	Greg Balue
Place of interview:	Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Approximate length of interview:	32 minutes
Transcribed by:	Zoë Morgan, Student Worker, Civil Rights Heritage Center
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Summary:	Jack Reed was the assistant to Joe Kernan, Mayor of South Bend from 1988 to 1997. He spoke of the experiences that led to him becoming assistant to Mayor Kernan, as well as his time as Battalion Chief and the first black riding chief for the South Bend Fire Department. Reed also discussed his experience with racism in restaurants, hotels, acquiring jobs, and in his own neighborhood.

- 0:00:08 [Greg Balue] Civil Rights Heritage Center. Oral interview. August 1<sup>st</sup> 2001, with Jack Reed, Assistant to the Mayor. Interview conducted by Greg Balue with Professor Les Lamon in attendance.
- 0:00:31 [Jack Reed] ...sense because I think ever since I've been in South Bend there's been a movement of some kind, I mean more hidden than... I mean when people think about the South and all the problems they've had here; we've been had a lot of problems here. I took [inaudible] like myself, I can remember a time out here in South Bend that I couldn't even get insurance because of my color. Housing was a big problem. I can remember when I was on the Fire Department in 1960 that I had called a realtor about a house on Blaine Street, I'll never forget it. He said, "It's a very lovely brick home, Mr. Reed. I'll be more than happy to talk to you about it. When can we get together and talk?" I told him what day I'd be at the fire station. His last words were, I'll never forget the way he said it, he said, "Man there's something I ought to tell you". I said, "What's that sir?" He said, "There's a colored family lives couple doors down". I said, "Sir, I don't know that that would be a problem for me. I like to think that I'm not prejudice. I don't have a problem with that". He said, "Okay, I just thought I'd let you know that".
- 0:01:32 So, of course when he came to the fire station two days later, and I made it my business to stay upstairs, and I had shared this with the other firefighters. When they called me, they said, "Jack, there's someone here to see you", and when I came downstairs, man I'm telling you. I took him upstairs, and he was just awkward and nervous all the time that we talked. Of course, I didn't rub it in or anything and treated him like I would anyone else, but I'll just never forget the way he said that. "There's something I ought to tell you: there's a colored family", and this was a realtor. You know, that was back in the '60s.
- [Greg Balue] That's... boy.
- [JR] Yeah.
- [GB] I'm telling you, that's like... Where... explain [overlapping conversation]
- [JR] It's off Lincolnway. Very beautiful homes back there at that time. It's deteriorated considerably since then, but it was a very beautiful area.
- [GB] And it was obviously predominantly white— [overlapping conversation]
- 0:02:18 [JR] Oh, yes, yes. Then we moved over on Studebaker Street in 1954, and I think with the exception of four families, they had a petition out. We saw it, trying to keep us out. There were four families that would not sign

the petition. How we happened to know about the petition is one of the fellows, Mr. Melack worked with Mr. Samuels, and was a friend of ours and showed it to him, and just so happened Mr. Samuels knew the family. I'll never forget who those four families were that did not sign. Matter of fact, one of the families came over a couple days later and offered their service, and of course they did not realize that we knew the people that had signed and the ones that did not sign. I think there's maybe just one family that finally did sell and move out after they found out that we didn't park cars in our yard and that we kept our grass up and made improvements and all that good stuff.

[GB] This is 1954?

[JR] This is, yeah, 1954.

[GB] And this was when you were you were married—

[JR] No. I was single. My father died, my two sisters, my mom, and myself.

[GB] Oh, okay. So this was...

[JR] 1954.

[GB] Your mom's house basically.

[JR] Mmhmm.

[GB] Okay.

0:03:28 [JR] Brimmer's Pool Room, I can remember being asked to leave there back in the '50s. Leonard Smith, he's an educator. They were in there shooting pool, and I just asked the gentleman, I said, "Sir, we have a right to stay in here and shoot pool". He picked up a cue stick and swung at me.

[GB] [inaudible]

[JR] Oh, yeah.

[GB] Did you have any places that had posted that, you know, blacks not allowed...

[JR] No, no.

[overlapping conversation]

[GB] ...whites only that you had in the South? So, this was all informal?

0:04:00 [JR] Yes, very much so. The Natatorium, I can remember as a youngster, we could swim there one night a week.

[overlapping conversation]

[Les Lamon] I've heard an urban legend, now you tell me whether it's more than legend, that you could do one night a week, and the night that African Americans could use the pool was the night before they drained it. Now, is that—

[JR] Now, I don't know. You mean at the Natatorium?

[GB] Yeah.

[JR] Yeah, I know we could use it one night a week, but as to what all the preliminaries were, I have no idea. Just one night a week, I remember that quite well. We could swim one night a week.

[GB] Was this posted? And was it just kids in general or just blacks?

[JR] I don't know that it was posted. It was just something that we knew because if you tried to get in any other night, you weren't allowed to go in.

[GB] Would there be any whites swimming on the night that you were there?

0:04:51 [JR] I don't recall, no. YMCA never had any problems, but the Natatorium did. Then there was a beach, I found out later it was owned by Mayor Prickett, that we went to. They actually told us, I was standing right there, I was with a police officer and our families, and they said, "Sir, I'm sorry we can't let you in". I said, "May I ask you why?" "We just don't want coloreds in here". I didn't find out until two or three years later Margie Prickett owned that building.

[LL] Where was the beach? A river beach?

[JR] I don't remember. It was a few miles from here.

[LL] Mishawaka, I assume.

[JR] No, it was a little further than Mishawaka if I'm not mistaken, yeah. She had something to do with the beach, we found that out a few years later. They turned us down.

[GB] That's not surprising. Would you ever go back to the pool room or the beach or places like that when you've been told that you weren't welcome?

0:05:45 [JR] No. I never went back to the place, other than the pool. The pool room, after many years I did. I didn't go back for a couple weeks because I didn't want to create any problems cause this guy swung at me with a cue

stick. He was lucky enough I caught the cue stick and did a number on him.

[GB] Do you remember places that you didn't go to eat or that you weren't welcome?

0:06:15 [JR] There was a restaurant, oh God, on South, North Michigan Street. I just don't remember the name of it. The word had gotten out that black folks weren't welcome there, and I never made an attempt to go really. But... I don't remember if it was Philadelphia or...

[GB] Well I was gonna say, I heard that Philadelphia—

[JR] I believe that's what it was.

[GB] Philadelphia was the one that did not, and that has since become an ice cream sweets shop where the kids hang out.

[JR] Mmhmm. Most of us hung out at Kresge's, they had a little lunch counter there, and I don't recall ever having any problems there.

[overlapping conversation]

[LL] The lunch counter of course was the big symbol in the South.

[JR] Oh, gosh. It's unreal.

0:06:57 [LL] You mentioned trouble getting insurance. That's the first time I've heard. Automobile insurance or health?

[JR] Life insurance.

[LL] Life insurance.

[JR] Yes. It was Credential.

[LL] Credential, okay.

[JR] Yes, Credential Life Insurance. They wouldn't insure me.

[LL] Do you remember when that might have been?

[JR] Back in the '50s.

[LL] Back in the '50s.

[JR] Yes, mmhmm.

[LL] When did you graduate from high school?

0:07:21 [JR] '53. When I got out of high school— I went to a predominantly white high school, Riley, and there were only maybe four blacks in the school

and that was the most that had been there since the school had been built. I'll be honest with you. No problems at all. No problems at all. The only problems I ever had in school... I played ball for Riley and we played down in Evansville, Indiana. They made me aware, there were two of us, myself and they had a black manager. Before we left, Spike Kelly said, "Jack, sorry I have to say this—". Also, Moe Morrison who was on a school board, was one of the coaches at the time, and said that, at which I was aware that, "You will not be able to stay in the hotel with the other players. You'll have to stay with a black family". Well I was aware of that because I had a cousin that played ball for Riley, and that's where he had to stay.

0:08:08 Well lucky enough, gentlemen, through the efforts of Spike Kelly and Moe Morrison and Red Clark, that didn't set right with them. They never made any bones about it. When we got down to Turkey Run, and all the guys were sitting in the, uh, eating dinner, and Spike came out and said, "John, we have some good news. Jack, you and Roy will be able to stay in the hotel". Man, it was just... and the ball players were just elated. Matter of fact, they gave us the nicest room there at the hotel and I would say over half the ball players slept on the floor in the room. Not that they were afraid of anything happening to Roy and myself, that it was just, they were just really happy that they said come about.

[LL] Was that at the State Park where you were at Turkey Run?

[JR] Yep, mmhmm. We were eating dinner there.

[LL] I mean, you stayed at the lodge at Turkey Run?

[JR] No, we just stopped to eat.

[GB] The hotel in Evansville is where you [inaudible]?

[JR] Right. Evansville. I was the first black, myself and Roy, the manager, was the first black to stay in a hotel there.

[GB] Roy who?

[JR] Roy Austin. He's in California now.

[GB] And he was the manger?

0:09:12 [JR] Yes, he was the manager. The ball— the crowd gave us a rough time. If you think Jackie Robinson had a tough time. The ball players on our team, as you're warming up before the game, what they would do, you know, the noise the ball players make and they would just scream and holler as we were running through our plays before the game started, just to drown out the insults they were shouting towards me.

[GB] You said the other person was Moe Harrison?

[overlapping conversation]

[JR] No, Moe Morrison.

[LL] I know him. He might—

[JR] He was a coach at that time, and also on the school board. He was an educator.

[LL] Recently he was, back three or four years ago, he was on the school board.

[JR] Right. Great guy.

[LL] Was he on the school board then?

[JR] No.

[LL] I didn't think so.

[JR] He only served one term.

[LL] Yeah. He was a person that you felt like was pushing to break down that...

[JR] Oh, most definitely. He and Spike Kelly, both.

[LL] They would have been active to... against that kind of discrimination.

0:10:12 [JR] Oh, yes. Yeah. Of course, when we left, it was with the understanding we were going to be staying with a black family and had to accept that if I wanted to play ball. Of course, we had no idea that Moe, and spike Kelly, and Red Clark were working on stuff like this to make something like this happen. They didn't tell us at all until we got down to Turkey Run cause they wasn't really sure, I guess, until we got down to Turkey Run and found out that we were going to be able to stay. It all kind of... the hotel they treated us quite nicely.

[GB] In 1953?

[JR] 1952.

[LL] It's interesting, I was coaching basketball in the mid '60s with an integrated team and had similar— I was in the South, of course, and had some similar experiences ten years later.

0:10:51 [JR] It was interesting, when we left that weekend, course all the guys take souvenirs. So, I had my luggage with me, and Roy, a few things we need for two nights, had his stuff in with me. Well, when got ready to finally

pack, there were some towels in there, and I said, "Roy, what are these towels?" He said, "Well, I got one for you". I said, "No, no, no, no." He said, "Jack, all the guys had taken towels and not us". He said, "Why?" I said, "Hey man, we're the first blacks to ever stay here and we're gonna..." He said, "Oh—". I said, "No. No. Not in my suitcase". Let me tell you what happened. We got on the bus, and they had a shake down, everyone had towels except, him the coach and myself.

[LL] Roy had it? He kept is.

[JR] No. If he did, I didn't know anything about it. He didn't put it in his suitcase, no. We was the only two that didn't have them. [overlapping conversation]

[GB] You were so right.

[JR] That's right. We're gonna do something like this? I said, "Oh, no". He said, "All the guys are doing this", and I said, "We're not all the guys, Roy. We're not all the guys." Yeah.

[GB] Did you feel that way... Maybe you could say, how often have you felt that you had that responsibility?

0:11:59 [JR] Every day of my life. It's a way of life. I mean, Les it's the case— You know what bothers me the most at 66 years of age that I will go to my grave never understanding? Or, or wondering why? Because when things happen to me, I don't have the satisfaction or any type of ground to know, is it because of my color or because I'm an individual? Now common sense would tell me that every time something happens, it's not because the color. I know this, but I don't have any way of being able to distinguish one from the other, and it's frustrating. That's one of the most frustrating things in life, for me, at 66 years of age that I never had that satisfaction. I've been taught through my childhood to realize that you build on those positive things because they're there.

0:12:44 To give you a good example, if I may, a year or so ago, my wife and I were at Martin's on Saturday around two in the afternoon. She had gone in the store. she said, "You coming?" I said, "No, I'll just sit here in the truck and wait for you". There was a lady sitting right across from us, from my truck. There were three individuals got out of three different cars. They were not people of color. Walked right by her car, close enough to touch it, and she looked at 'em. After about ten minutes, I said, "Well, I think I'll go get a donut [inaudible]". Got out of my truck, walked towards her car, not gonna be close enough to touch it, and guess what she did? You better believe it. She locked her doors. So, these are the kind of things— but let me tell you what else happened. So, I shared it with my wife, and she said, "Jack, you've had a lot worse things", and I said, "I understand that



Mary, but in this day and age, you know, hey, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon?"

0:13:40 So, thanks to my mom, when I say you build on the positive things, that Monday when I came into work at the County City Building, I had to stop on the second floor to do something for senior citizens. There was a lady, not of color, and a little girl on the elevator. I took my cap on, and I said, "Good morning", and the lady said, "Good morning". The little girl smiled, and she didn't say anything, but I knew that child was not afraid of me. Pretty soon she spoke, and she said, "Mister, you wanna see my two babies?" I said, "Sure". Gentlemen, she opened up this little blanket, and there was a black doll and a white doll. One was Mary, one was Nancy, I'll never forget it. She kissed both of them on the cheek at the same time and talked about her babies. Then they got off on the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> floor, and she said, "Sir, have a nice day". I said, "You too, ma'am". So, I shared that with my wife, and I said, "That's what you have to do. Build on those positive things. When you have these negative things that happen in your life, you have to build on positive things because they're there".

0:14:41 Now I've gotten on the elevator, you and this gentleman get on the elevator - I had it happen couple years ago. There was a little boy with his mother. Now, this person was not of color and he looked. When I got on, [audible gasp] he grabbed his mother by the leg. What does that tell you? What does that tell you?

[GB] He just answered my last question.

[JR] Children tell me a lot about people, they really do. They tell me a lot about people. I hung onto this. You might want to ask that. Do you have a copy of this? I remember an article they had in the paper about all that school teacher stuff. [overlapping conversation] It's kind of an interesting article, I think.

[LL] This is...

0:15:25 [JR] Michiana News. I think that's something that came out... I think I was 58.

[LL] [inaudible] [overlapping conversation]

[JR] The Tribune. At one time, they had a little article that was written by a lady called "The Colored Circle".

[LL] The Colored...?

[JR] The Colored Circle. It was called "The Colored Circle".

[LL] [inaudible] [overlapping conversation] It wasn't Margaret [inaudible], was it?

[JR] Oh, Jesus, way back before her time.

[LL] She's a name that someone has given us that does, that used to write for the paper. The colored news.

[JR] I can't think of the lady's name. Mrs. Rob— Mrs. Robertson's mother, but I don't remember her name, but she wrote for "The Colored Circle", and anything pertaining to people of color. That's where it was...

[GB] Robertson. The teacher?

0:16:05 [JR] No, no. This lady is deceased now. Renelda Roberts, she died.<sup>1</sup> They named that center over on Eddy street after her. I think it was her mother that wrote that article for "The Colored Circle" and that was back years and years ago.

[LL] I haven't seen this, and this has got younger pictures of a lot of folks, I see Joe Luten.

[overlapping conversation]

[JR] I don't know whether you want to borrow that for a while...

[GB] Could we get a copy of it? Do you mind?

[JR] Sure, yeah. I think there's some interesting reading in there.

0:16:35 [LL] Yeah, there it is. This is exactly the kind of thing we wanna hear: the stories of people— if you've got things like this, Jack. If you come across anything else...

[overlapping conversation]

[JR] Do you have that copy?

[LL] No, I think that's the one that's fairly... I think I personally have a copy, but the center does not. I haven't seen that in a while. I'm not sure I know where to find it.

[JR] If you wanna borrow it, you're more than happy to do so.

[LL] Greg, why don't you keep these?

[JR] Okay. There's something else you might want to take with you. It's just some stuff I pulled out.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Reed is referring to Renelda Robertson, and the Robertson Community Learning Center.

[GB] I thought you didn't know anything?

0:17:15 [JR] You know... Luther Taylor, like I say I worked with Luther for quite a few years. He worked for me when he first came on at the Fire Department, and what we had tried to do was learn to take advantage of a disadvantage. Realizing that we're at a disadvantage, but you can learn to take advantage of a disadvantage. Luther asked, "What do you mean by that?" I said, "Well, work harder, do a little more". I said, "Let me ask you a question". I said, "The fire chief for the mayor would pass by a block, see 8 guys standing out by a fire. Who do you think he would remember?" He said, "Us". I said, "Okay, that's a disadvantage, but we'll learn to utilize it to our advantage". "Well how do you do that?" "You work harder, you learn more, you do more". The day we were talking about that, I'll show you how the good Lord works. A gentleman passed by. He said, "Jack, how are you?" I said, "Fine". He said, "You're a new rookie, Luther Taylor". I said, "Yeah, so?" Luther said, "Yes". So, then he walked on and he said, I said, "That's what I mean, Luther. You been on a job three months, everyone knows who you are. I been on the job 15 years and don't know half these guys". I said, "Disadvantage". I said, "Notice his clothing when he comes back". So, when he came back that way, I said, "Look at his clothes. Look at his shoes". Luther said, "God, he looks like he's been working in a coal yard". I said, "Yeah, look at my shoes and look at my clothes. This is where you learn to sell yourself, Luther. This is the way".

0:18:40 Then when Luther got to be captain, we trained every day. I told Luther now, I said, "Now, I was taught by a black captain", and I said, "He taught me to sell myself." "You don't have to kiss anybody's foot to do this, but there are some things you have to do. Make people aware that you're there". I said, "So that's the reason I train all the time". I said, "Some of these guys would train once a month and write out cards and fake it". I said, "We go out and train everyday". So, when Luther got to be captain, he would go out and train every day. I called him one day and I said, "Luther, I know that you're going out training", I said, "but no one knows that". He said, "Well, what should I do?" I said, "Instead of calling an alarm station and tell 'em that you're going out. All they're saying is 'engine 7's out of service'. They don't say, 'Why?'. What you need to do when you get in that fire truck and get on that hand radio put engine 7 out of service for practice. I said, "Then everybody—"

[LL] Everybody hears it.

[JR] That's right. That's where it started to help him. I said, "You're doing something most of these officers don't: you're training. You're training".

[LL] How did you end up choosing the firefighters? Did you have a mentor like that?

0:19:53 [JR] No, not really. What happened after I went off to school, and I had to drop out because of death in the family and so forth and so on, I was working at Gilbert's Clothing Store during high school. All I really wanted to do, Les, was go on the police department, not the police, on the state police and I was turned down. Matter of fact, the Lieutenant Governor shared this story down in Indianapolis just recently. What happened was that Paul Gilbert was trying to see to it that I got on. He got a phone call from Indianapolis, and I was still working at the store. At that time, he had extensions, and he said, "Jack, get on the other line. I think we have some good news". I got on the other line, and the attorney that he was talking to said, "Mr. Jack Reed, blah blah, he meets all this. He'd be a great candidate for the state police, but to be honest with you, Mr. Gilbert, we are not ready for a colored state policeman". Of course, he had no idea I was on the other end of the phone. And, of course Mr. Gilbert had no idea they were going to say that, otherwise he wouldn't have put me on the phone. Boy, you talk about something that [inaudible]...

[GB] There wasn't any...?

[overlapping conversation]

0:21:0r [JR] Oh, no, no, no. What happened with the state police; it took a court order. I was on the Fire Department, came over on Walter Cronkite. Some young man was tried for the job. He was a college graduate, had some of highest scores recorded. His last name was Ewing, if I'm not mistaken, I'll never forget that. They turned him down, and he took it to court. Well, quite a few years later, he won the lawsuit, and they offered him the job. In the meantime, some chain, some food chain had picked him up and saw it on TV and picked him up. From what I understand, he retired a millionaire. He turned the job down.

[GB] What year was that? Do you remember? When were you turned down?

[JR] It was either '57 or '58.

[LL] That you were turned down?

[JR] Mmhmm.

[LL] So his would have probably been in the '60s?

[JR] Oh, it had to be in the '60s. Oh, excuse me. I went on the Fire Department in 1960, and yeah. Then I remember back in the '50s, Jack Scott, who was mayor of South Bend, at one time was a good friend of Paul Gilbert's. He ran for governor and he realized what was going on through Paul. What he told me one day was, he said, "Jack", he said, "if

I'm lucky enough to become governor and you pass everything, we'll rectify this immediately." But he didn't, so...

[GB] You joined the Fire Department in 1960?

[JR] 1960. April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960.

[GB] Were there many blacks on there at the time?

0:22:31 [JR] I was the fourth black to come on the job. The first one had a lot of problems. I didn't have near the problems that the first one had, but I did have some problems. The biggest problem with me was that they didn't realize I was my own man. I'm not a follower. I mean, you just, you know, if Steve Luecke told me to jump off this 14<sup>th</sup> floor building, I would tell him what he needed to do. If you understand what I'm saying, and that kinda created problems. I questioned things, why, you know. I can remember one time; I had been on the job maybe a few years. One of the pump companies... I was on a pump company. It was in the wintertime, cold, and we were locked in. We had our hose picked up, and the main company had a lot of hose out there. So, I went over started rolling hose. When I got back to the truck, and the officer, one of the guys said, "We don't do things like that". I said, "Well, what do you mean?" "Every company takes care of his own holes". I said, "Well common sense would tell you that if I helped them, if we all helped them, we could go back that much sooner". "Cause that's not the way it's done". Well I didn't do it for a while but pretty soon I read the rule book and I didn't see anything in the rule book that said I couldn't. So, I continued doing it.

0:23:41 So, it didn't make me real popular. I can remember one time, one of the guys, we were at a fire, brought some stuff back that they shouldn't, and wanted to put it on the fire truck. I said, "No". He said, "What do you mean no?" I said, "You can't put it back while I'm riding". So, he didn't, but he did get it back to the fire station, I'm sorry to say. Then I was at a union meeting one time and one of the guys mentioned, he introduced himself, and I'll never forget him saying, he said, "At the rate you're going, Jack, you're not going to be a very popular guy". I explained to him, I said, "Young man, they didn't hire me to be popular on this job. They hired me to fight fires." Thank you, have a nice day.

[GB] What'd you end up as?

[JR] Battalion Chief. First riding chief in the history of South Bend.

[GB] You didn't have to be popular. [overlapping conversation]

0:24:28 [JR] No, but it just, and that was because of Mayor Nemeth did something no one had ever done. Matter of fact, I came up to thank Mayor Nemeth,

and I brought Luther Taylor and Howard Buchanan, who were captains at the time. I can remember that when they made me chief in 1976, I was called to the office by the chief at that time and what he wanted to know was, could I find out where Luther Taylor and Howard Buchanan wanted to go? I said, "What do you mean where they wanted to go?" He said, "We're gonna have to bust them down to lieutenants". So immediately, I came and got on the phone and I called Joe Dorn and told Joe Dorn what was going on. Very upset, he said, "Young man". I asked him, and I said, "Joe, why is it that they give one of something and they take away from the rest of us?" He said, "Jack, I don't know what's going on, but let me find out". He said, "I'll get back with you tomorrow". Joe called me back that night. He said, "Young man," he said, "I just talked with Mayor Nemeth". Of course, Mayor Nemeth had no idea. This was just the way it was in politics at that time. Because there were so many...

[GB] There was too many up there at the top...

0:25:30 [JR] They didn't have any. I would have been the first riding chief, and there were other factions that needed to be satisfied. Everybody wants to be a chief, you know, and you're going to give it to a black guy? Well they have to because of Mayor Nemeth. So, I went home the next day, and the following day the chief called me in the office and said, "Jack, we didn't realize that Luther and Howard were your protégés. We want to assure you they will stay captains".

0:26:55 Then the next problem I had, when I become chief, we had drivers and they had a very tough time finding a driver for me. Some of the reason was some of the people didn't like me, and the others didn't like the idea that white guys were gonna be driving a black guy, didn't like the idea. Wilbert Bollinger stepped forward about— let me back up a little bit. Joe Dorn called me again, and said he had talked to the mayor, and the mayor understood that I was having a tough time finding a driver. I told Joe, I said, "No, I'm not, they are. They're having a tough time trying to find me a driver". He said "Jack, we realize that you would probably be more comfortable having a black driver, but under no circumstances should you take a black driver". I said, "I don't intend to". Then Wilbert Bollinger stepped forth, about maybe a month or so later, and asked me and said, "Jack, I understand you're looking for a driver". He said, "I'd like to drive you if you'll have me". I said, "I'll be more than happy to do so". So, he became my driver, but I never referred to him as a driver. Any time we go places, I referred to him as my partner. He asked me one time, he said, "All the other chiefs call their drivers, drivers. Is there a reason that you don't call me a driver?" I said, "You're not my driver, you're my partner".

[LL] I depend on you; you depend on me.

[JR] That's right. That's the way it should be.

[LL] When did you come into... you probably... I'm sure it was when you retired, that you came into city administration? It wasn't under Mayor Nemeth was it?

[JR] No, it was under Joe Kernan.

[GB] I thought it was under Joe.

0:27:24 [JR] In 1988, Joe called Luther... Roger Parent made Luther Fire Chief in 1985, which was excellent. That's a long story, won't even go there. That's a very interesting story. In '88, he called Luther and said that he was gonna offer me this job and wanted to know if I'd be interested. Luther called me and said, "Jack, you're not gonna believe this". I said, "Believe what?" He said, "Mayor Kernan wants you to call him". I said, "Okay", and I could tell in his voice something was going on. He said, "Aw man", he just kept saying, "Aw man". So, I called Joe, and we met for 8 weeks, gentlemen. I was just very apprehensive about wanting to do this and my wife asked me, she was really disappointed... I was offered the Fire Chief - the main Fire Chief job a couple times, and I turned it down. The reason I turned it down was because I had a part time job as a salesman, and as a salesman and as a Battalion Chief, I could make more than Chief would be making, so it just wasn't that feasible for me to even think about it.

0:28:26 Then when Joe asked me about this job, she asked me, she said, I'll never forget, she said, "Jack", she said, "they offered you the Fire Chief job a couple times, you turned it down. May I ask why you decided to take this job?" It took me a few weeks to make up my mind. I said, "Mary, I really don't know, but I'll know one of these days". One morning, I woke up to get ready to go jogging, and when I got back that afternoon I said, "I think I know I'm gonna take this job". She says, "Why?" I said, "Because it's an opportunity that won't be afforded to many blacks". I said, "For two reasons: it will show people that if given an opportunity, we can do anything anyone else can do if afforded an opportunity and hoping and praying it will make it somewhat easier for the next young man or woman coming along".

0:29:11 When I met with Mayor Nemeth, that was one of the things that I stressed. I came up there and I said, I called and made an appointment. I said, "Mayor", he said, "Jack, what can I do for you?" I said, "First of all, I want to thank you for doing something no one else had the guts to do". I said, "As far as I'm concerned, you're the Branch Rickey of the South Bend Fire Department". I said, "I appreciate it". He said, "Well you know this is interesting". He said, "I very rarely have people thank me for anything". I said, "I brought these two gentleman along for a reason. Captain Taylor

and Captain Buchanan". I said, "So many times in the past that few are judged by all, and I said, "What I wanna say to you is that, I'm gonna be a good Chief and I'm gonna make it, but just in case I don't, because I'm flesh and blood, all I ask you to do is remember the name is Taylor and Buchanan. Please don't make them suffer because any mistake that I might make. That's what I promise you. I won't make any mistakes". He looked at me and he said, "Jack, I give you my word, I won't forget that. Buchanan and Taylor. Not Reed". I said, "Okay". Lucky enough—

[GB] He did?

[JR] Yes. It worked out real good. It had to cause, like I said, there were so many things riding on being the first, even if I was second or third, you just... good common sense. You just do all the right things.

[LL] That was in the '80s?

[JR] That was in '76.

[LL] '76.

[JR] When I got promoted to Chief.

[LL] When you were promoted?

[JR] Mmhmm.

[GB] Alright. Did you retire from the Fire Department then?

0:30:43

[JR] Not really. What happened, when Joe asked me to come up here, and after making up my mind that I wanted to do so, I went on a sabbatical leave from the Fire Department. Basically, what that meant, it had to be renewed every year through our legal department. They checked down state to make sure. Cause what I shared with Joe, I said, "For me to come up here now, I would be losing money plus time of service cause when I retire, pension". He said, "Well let me see if we can work that out". I said, "Nothing can be done". He said, "Jack, that's what I have a legal department for". A couple weeks later, he called me back, and I came back up, and we talked a lot. I said, "Well, oh my gosh", He said, "It can be done". I said "Well, I need to think about this and all". He said, "Take all the time you need and think about it". So I went on sabbatical leave, and like I said, what that meant was each year I was asked to sign papers, blah blah blah. After about three or four years I began to feel quite comfortable. The stipulation was that if Joe and I couldn't get along, or didn't make it, or if I didn't like it, I could go back to the Fire Department and pick up the pieces and take over—

[Audio ends]